

Appl. No. 09/651,042  
Amdt. dated September 23, 2003  
Reply to Office Action of August 7, 2003

**Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

1. (canceled)
2. (canceled)
3. (canceled)
4. (canceled)
5. (canceled)
6. (canceled)
7. (previously presented) A bonded composite, comprising:
  - (a) a first flexible sheet material having first and second opposing major surfaces, the first and second major surfaces defining a first overall area of said first flexible sheet material, and a first web interior between the first and second major surfaces, said first flexible sheet material being suitable for use in a personal care absorbent article;
  - (b) a second flexible sheet material having third and fourth opposing major surfaces, the third and fourth major surfaces defining a second overall area of said second flexible sheet material, and a second web interior between the third and fourth major surfaces, said second flexible sheet material being suitable for use in a personal care absorbent article, and being bonded to the first flexible sheet material by bond elements defining an elongate bond pattern, the elongate bond pattern having regularly repeating bond segments along a length thereof, the bond elements in each bond segment being spaced from each other

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according to a pattern of bond elements common to the respective bond segments, the bond pattern having a pattern length, and first and second side edges, the pattern length and the side edges, in combination, defining a third area within which the bond pattern is defined, the third area being smaller than at least one of the first and second areas of the respective first and second flexible sheet materials such that a portion of at least one of the first and second areas of respective said first and second flexible sheet materials is outside the bond pattern, the bond pattern having a bond pattern interior between the first and second side edges, and a pattern width between the first and second side edges, and a central longitudinal axis, the bond pattern comprising an array of separate, distinct, and spaced elongate bond elements in a repeating arrangement affixing said first and second flexible sheet materials to each other, ones of said bond elements extending across the width of said bond pattern, from loci proximate the side edges, at angles of between about 10 degrees and about 65 degrees with respect to the longitudinal axis, a bond width being defined by a distance between the first and second side edges perpendicular to the longitudinal axis, including spaces between bond elements, at any point along the length of the pattern, such bond width extending along the pattern width, bond element contact lengths being correspondingly defined along the bond width, the composite of the bond element contact lengths along a respective bond width defining a composite contact length for the respective bond width, the composite contact length, taken at equally spaced intervals along the length of the bond pattern, defining an average composite contact length, the composite contact length at a given point along the length of the pattern varying from the average composite contact length by no more than about 13 percent.

8. (previously presented) A bonded composite as in Claim 7, the composite bond element contact length, at any point along the length of the pattern, varying from the average composite bond element contact length by no more than about 10 percent.

9. (previously presented) A bonded composite as in Claim 7, the composite bond element contact length, at any point along the length of the pattern, varying from the average composite bond element contact length by no more than about 8 percent.

10. (previously presented) A bonded composite as in Claim 7, said bond pattern comprising

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- (i) as first ones of said bond elements, a first sub-array of longitudinally-oriented separate, distinct, and spaced bond elements disposed along the length of the bond pattern, proximate the side edges of the bond pattern, and
- (ii) as second ones of said bond elements, a second sub-array of longitudinally-oriented separate, distinct, and spaced bond elements disposed along the length of the bond pattern, inwardly of the side edges of the bond pattern and generally inwardly of said first sub-array of bond elements, respective ones of said second sub-array of bond elements having spaced first and second ends, and legs extending from the respective ends toward each other and outwardly of the longitudinal axis along the length of the bond pattern to outwardly-disposed portions of said legs between respective ones of said first sub-array of bond elements.

11. (previously presented) A bonded composite as in Claim 10, said first sub-array of bond elements alternating along the length, and on opposing side edges, of the bond pattern, an imaginary contact line spanning the width of the bond pattern at a given locus along the length of the bond pattern which intersects a said one of the bond elements of said first sub-array of bond elements on a given side of the bond pattern, also including, on the opposing side of the bond pattern, a said outwardly-disposed portion of a respective said leg of the corresponding one of the bond elements of said second sub-array of bond elements, such that the distance between distal ends of the most remote ones of the bond elements along the respective imaginary contact line spanning the width of the bond pattern represents at least about 70 percent, up to 100 percent, of the width of the bond pattern, whereby the outwardly-disposed portions of the respective said legs provide balancing support on opposing sides of the longitudinal axis from respective one of the bond elements of said first sub-array of bond elements or opposing one of the bond elements of said second sub-array of bond elements during formation of the bond pattern.

12. (previously presented) A bonded composite as in Claim 10, said first sub-array of bond elements alternating along the length, and on opposing side edges, of the bond pattern, an imaginary contact line spanning the width of the bond pattern at a given locus along the length of the bond pattern which intersects a said one of the bond elements of said first sub-array of bond elements on a given side of the bond pattern, also including on the opposing side of the bond pattern, a said outwardly-disposed portion of a respective said leg of the corresponding bond element of said second sub-array of bond elements, such that the distance between distal ends of the most remote ones of the bond elements along the respective imaginary contact line spanning

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the width of the bond pattern represents at least about 75 percent, up to 90 percent, of the width of the bond pattern, whereby the outwardly-disposed portions of the respective said legs provide balancing support on opposing sides of the longitudinal axis from respective ones of said first sub-array of bond elements or opposing ones of said second sub-array of bond elements during formation of the bond pattern.

13. (previously presented) A bonded composite as in Claim 10, said first sub-array of bond elements alternating along the length, and on opposing side edges, of the bond pattern, an imaginary contact line spanning the width of the bond pattern at a given locus along the length of the bond pattern which intersects a said one of the bond elements of said first sub-array of bond elements on a given side of the bond pattern, also including on the opposing side of the bond pattern, a said outwardly-disposed portion of a respective said leg of the corresponding bond element of said second sub-array of bond elements, such that the distance between distal ends of the most remote ones of the bond elements along the respective imaginary contact line spanning the width of the bond pattern represents at least about 80 percent, up to 85 percent, of the width of the bond pattern, whereby the outwardly-disposed portions of the respective said legs provide balancing support on opposing sides of the longitudinal axis from respective ones of said bond elements of said first sub-array of bond elements or opposing ones of said bond elements of said second sub-array of bond elements during formation of the bond pattern.

14. (previously presented) A bonded composite as in Claim 7 wherein bonds corresponding to said bond elements are formed by application of thermal energy to at least one of said first and second flexible sheet materials.

15. (previously presented) A bonded composite as in Claim 7 wherein bonds corresponding to said bond elements are formed by application of ultrasonic-frequency energy to at least one of said first and second flexible sheet materials.

16. (previously presented) A bonded composite as in Claim 7 wherein at least one of said first and said second flexible sheet materials comprises polymeric material selected from the group consisting of polyolefins, polyesters, and polyamides, and copolymers, mixtures, and blends of said polymeric materials.

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17. (previously presented) A bonded composite as in Claim 7 wherein at least one of said first and said second flexible sheet materials comprises a fibrous web having a multiplicity of randomly-spaced small openings extending from one of the respective major surfaces into the interior of the respective web.

18. (previously presented) A bonded composite as in Claim 7 wherein ones of said bond elements of said second sub-array of bond elements extend from loci proximate the side edges to loci proximate the longitudinal axis.

19. (previously presented) A bonded composite as in Claim 7 wherein increases and decreases in power distribution across the width of the bond pattern, as the bond pattern is being formed, define variations in composite contact lengths as compared to the average composite contact length for a given bond pattern for at least a complete circumferential rotation of a rotary anvil, wherein variations in composite contact lengths of the bond pattern reflect no more than about 13 percent of the average composite contact length of the bond pattern throughout the complete circumferential anvil rotation.

20. (previously presented) A bonded composite, comprising:

- (a) a first flexible sheet material having first and second opposing major surfaces, the first and second major surfaces defining a first overall area of said first flexible sheet material, and a first web interior between the first and second major surfaces, said first flexible sheet material being suitable for use in a personal care absorbent article;
- (b) a second flexible sheet material having third and fourth opposing major surfaces, the third and fourth major surfaces defining a second overall area of said second flexible sheet material, and a second web interior between the third and fourth major surfaces, said second flexible sheet material being suitable for use in a personal care absorbent article; and
- (c) a multiplicity of bond elements defining bonds bonding said first and second flexible sheet materials to each other in a bond pattern, the bond pattern having a pattern length, and first and second side edges, the pattern length and the side edges, in combination, defining a third area within which the bond pattern is defined, the third area being smaller than at least one of the first and second areas of the respective first and second flexible sheet materials such that a portion of at least one of the first and second areas of

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respective said first and second flexible sheet materials is outside the bond pattern, the bond pattern having a bond pattern interior between the first and second side edges, and a pattern width between the first and second side edges, and a central longitudinal axis, the bond pattern comprising an array of separate, distinct, and spaced elongate bond elements in a repeating arrangement affixing said first and second flexible sheet materials to each other,

(d) as ones of said bond elements, a first sub-array of longitudinally-oriented separate and distinct bond elements disposed along the length, and proximate the side edges of, the bond pattern, the side edges of the bond pattern being defined generally between outwardly-disposed sides of sequentially-adjacent ones of said first sub-array of bond elements, and

(e) as ones of said bond elements, a second sub-array of longitudinally-oriented separate, distinct, and spaced bond elements disposed along the length of the bond pattern, inwardly of the side edges of the bond pattern and generally inwardly of said first sub-array of bond elements, respective ones of said second sub-array of bond elements having spaced first and second ends, and legs extending from the respective first and second ends toward each other and outwardly of the longitudinal axis along the length of the bond pattern to outwardly-disposed portions of said legs, joined to each other, between said ones of said first sub-array of bond elements.

21. (previously presented) A bonded composite as in Claim 20, said ones of said first sub-array of bond elements alternating along the length, and on opposing side edges, of the bond pattern, an imaginary contact line spanning the width of the bond pattern at a given locus along the length of the bond pattern which intersects a said one of said first sub-array of bond elements on a given side of the bond pattern, also including on the opposing side of the bond pattern, a said outwardly-disposed portion of a respective said leg of the corresponding one of said second sub-array of bond elements, such that the distance between distal ends of the most remote ones of the bond elements along the respective imaginary contact line spanning the width of the bond pattern represents at least about 70 percent, up to 100 percent, of the width of the bond pattern, whereby the outwardly-disposed portions of the respective said legs provide balancing support on opposing sides of the longitudinal axis from respective ones of said first sub-array of bond elements or opposing ones of said second sub-array of bond elements during formation of the bond pattern.

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22. (previously presented) A bonded composite as in Claim 20, said ones of said first sub-array of bond elements alternating along the length, and on opposing side edges, of the bond pattern, an imaginary contact line spanning the width of the bond pattern at a given locus along the length of the bond pattern which intersects a said one of said first sub-array of bond elements on a given side of the bond pattern, also including on the opposing side of the bond pattern, a said outwardly-disposed portion of a respective said leg of the corresponding one of said second sub-array of bond elements, such that the distance between distal ends of the most remote ones of the bond elements along the respective imaginary contact line spanning the width of the bond pattern represents at least about 75 percent, up to 90 percent, of the width of the bond pattern, whereby the outwardly-disposed portions of the respective said legs provide balancing support on opposing sides of the longitudinal axis from respective ones of said first sub-array of bond elements or opposing ones of said second sub-array of bond elements during formation of the bond pattern.

23. (previously presented) A bonded composite as in Claim 20, said ones of said first sub-array of bond elements alternating along the length, and on opposing side edges, of the bond pattern, an imaginary contact line spanning the width of the bond pattern at a given locus along the length of the bond pattern which intersects a said one of said first sub-array of bond elements on a given side of the bond pattern, also including on the opposing side of the bond pattern, a said outwardly-disposed portion of a respective said leg of the corresponding one of said second sub-array of bond elements, such that the distance between distal ends of the most remote ones of the bond elements along the respective imaginary contact line spanning the width of the bond pattern represents at least about 80 percent, up to 85 percent, of the width of the bond pattern, whereby the outwardly-disposed portions of the respective said legs provide balancing support on opposing sides of the longitudinal axis from respective ones of said first sub-array of bond elements or opposing ones of said second sub-array of bond elements during formation of the bond pattern.

24. (previously presented) A bonded composite as in Claim 20 wherein bonds corresponding to said bond elements are formed by application of thermal energy to at least one of said first and second flexible sheet materials.

25. (previously presented) A bonded composite as in Claim 20 wherein bonds corresponding to said bond elements are formed by application of ultrasonic-frequency energy to at least one of said first and second flexible sheet materials.

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26. (previously presented) A bonded composite as in Claim 20 wherein at least one of said first and said second flexible sheet materials comprises polymeric material selected from the group consisting of polyolefins, polyesters, and polyamides, and copolymers, mixtures, and blends of said polymeric materials.

27. (previously presented) A bonded composite as in Claim 20 wherein at least one of said first and said second flexible sheet materials comprises a fibrous web having a multiplicity of randomly-spaced small openings extending from one of the respective major surfaces into the interior of the respective web.

28. (canceled)

29. (previously presented) A bonded composite as in Claim 20 wherein ones of said second sub-array of bond elements extend from loci proximate the side edges to loci proximate the longitudinal axis.

30. (canceled)

31. (canceled)

32. (canceled)

33. (canceled)

34. (canceled)

35. (previously presented) A bonded composite, comprising:

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- (a) a first flexible sheet material having first and second opposing major surfaces, the first and second major surfaces defining a first overall area of said first flexible sheet material, and a first web interior between the first and second major surfaces, said first flexible sheet material being suitable for use in a personal care absorbent article;
- (b) a second flexible sheet material having third and fourth opposing major surfaces, the third and fourth major surfaces defining a second overall area of said second flexible sheet material, and a second web interior between the third and fourth major surfaces, said second flexible sheet material being suitable for use in a personal care absorbent article, and being bonded to the first flexible sheet material by bond elements defining an elongate bond pattern, the elongate bond pattern having regularly repeating bond segments along a length thereof, the bond elements in each bond segment being spaced from each other according to a pattern of bond elements common to the respective bond segments, the bond pattern having a pattern length, and first and second side edges, the pattern length and the side edges, in combination, defining a third area within which the bond pattern is defined, the third area being smaller than at least one of the first and second areas of the respective first and second flexible sheet materials such that a portion of at least one of the first and second areas of respective said first and second flexible sheet materials is outside the bond pattern, the bond pattern having a bond pattern interior between the first and second side edges, and a pattern width between the first and second side edges, and a central longitudinal axis, the bond pattern comprising an array of separate and distinct elongate bond elements in a repeating arrangement affixing said first and second flexible sheet materials to each other, a bond width being defined by the width of the pattern perpendicular to the longitudinal axis, including spaces between bond elements, at any point along the length of the pattern, such bond width extending along the pattern width, bond element contact lengths being correspondingly defined along the bond width, the composite of the bond element contact lengths along a respective bond width defining a composite contact length for the respective bond width, the composite contact length, taken at equally spaced intervals along the length of the bond pattern, defining an average composite contact length, a steady power distribution across the width of the bond pattern, as the bond pattern is being formed, defining minimum variations in composite contact lengths as compared to the average composite contact length for the bond pattern for at least a complete circumferential rotation of a rotary anvil reflecting the bond pattern, wherein variations in composite contact lengths of the bond pattern reflect no more than about 13 percent of the average composite contact length of the bond pattern throughout the complete circumferential anvil rotation.

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36. (original) A bonded composite as in Claim 35, the composite contact length, at any point along the length of the pattern, varying from the average composite contact length by no more than about 10 percent.

37. (previously presented) A bonded composite as in Claim 35, said bond pattern comprising

- (i) as first ones of said bond elements, a first sub-array of longitudinally-oriented separate, distinct, and spaced bond elements disposed along the length of the bond pattern, proximate the side edges of the bond pattern, and
- (ii) as second ones of said bond elements, a second sub-array of longitudinally-oriented separate, distinct, and spaced bond elements disposed along the length of the bond pattern, inwardly of the side edges of the bond pattern and generally inwardly of said first sub-array of bond elements, respective ones of said second sub-array of bond elements having spaced first and second ends, and legs extending from the respective ends toward each other and outwardly of the longitudinal axis along the length of the bond pattern to outwardly-disposed portions of said legs between said ones of said first sub-array of bond elements.

38. (previously presented) A bonded composite as in Claim 37, ones of said first sub-array of bond elements alternating along the length, and on opposing side edges, of the bond pattern, an imaginary contact line spanning the width of the bond pattern at a given locus along the length of the bond pattern which intersects a bond element of said first sub-array of bond elements on a given side of the bond pattern, also including on the opposing side of the bond pattern, a said outwardly-disposed portion of a respective said leg of the corresponding bond element of said second sub-array of bond elements, such that the distance between distal ends of the most remote ones of the bond elements along the respective imaginary contact line spanning the width of the bond pattern represents at least about 70 percent, up to 100 percent, of the width of the bond pattern, whereby the outwardly-disposed portions of the respective said legs provide balancing support on opposing sides of the longitudinal axis from respective ones of said first sub-array of bond elements or opposing ones of said second sub-array of bond elements during formation of the bond pattern.

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39. (previously presented) A bonded composite as in Claim 37, ones of said first sub-array of bond elements alternating along the length, and on opposing side edges, of the bond pattern, an imaginary contact line spanning the width of the bond pattern at a given locus along the length of the bond pattern which intersects a bond element of said first sub-array of bond elements on a given side of the bond pattern, also including on the opposing side of the bond pattern, a said outwardly-disposed portion of a respective said leg of the corresponding bond element of said second sub-array of bond elements, such that the distance between distal ends of the most remote ones of the bond elements along the respective imaginary contact line spanning the width of the bond pattern represents at least about 75 percent, up to 90 percent, of the width of the bond pattern, whereby the outwardly-disposed portions of the respective said legs provide balancing support on opposing sides of the longitudinal axis from respective ones of said first sub-array of bond elements or opposing ones of said second sub-array of bond elements during formation of the bond pattern.

40. (previously presented) A bonded composite as in Claim 35 wherein ones of said second sub-array of bond elements extend from loci proximate the side edges to loci proximate the longitudinal axis.

41. (previously presented) An absorbent article having a front portion and a rear portion, and a crotch portion extending between said front portion and said rear portion, said absorbent article comprising:

- (a) a first flexible sheet material having first and second opposing major surfaces, the first and second major surfaces defining a first overall area of said first flexible sheet material, and a first web interior between the first and second major surfaces;
- (b) a second flexible sheet material having third and fourth opposing major surfaces, the third and fourth major surfaces defining a second overall area of said second flexible sheet material, and a second web interior between the third and fourth major surfaces; and
- (c) a multiplicity of bond elements defining bonds bonding said first and second flexible sheet materials to each other in a bond pattern, and
- (d) an absorbent core disposed adjacent at least one of said first and said second flexible sheet materials, the bond pattern having a pattern length and including a central longitudinal axis, and first and second side edges, the pattern length and the side edges, in combination, defining a third area within which the bond pattern is formed, the third area

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being smaller than at least one of the first and second areas of the respective first and second flexible sheet materials such that a portion of at least one of the first and second areas of respective said first and second flexible sheet materials is outside the bond pattern, the bond pattern having a bond pattern interior between the first and second side edges, and a pattern width between the first and second side edges, the bond pattern comprising an array of separate, distinct, and spaced elongate bond elements in a repeating arrangement affixing said first and second flexible sheet materials to each other, ones of said bond elements extending across the width of said bond pattern, from loci proximate the side edges, at angles of between about 10 degrees and about 65 degrees with respect to the longitudinal axis, a bond width being defined across the width of the bond pattern perpendicular to the longitudinal axis, including spaces between bond elements, at any point along the length of the pattern, such bond width extending along the pattern width, bond element contact lengths being correspondingly defined along the bond width, the composite of the bond element contact lengths along a respective bond width defining a composite contact length for the respective bond width, the composite contact length, taken at equally spaced intervals along the length of the bond pattern, defining an average composite contact length, the composite contact length at a given point along the length of the pattern varying from the average composite contact length by no more than about 13 percent.

42. (original) An absorbent article as in Claim 41, the composite contact length, at any point along the length of the pattern, varying from the average composite contact length by no more than about 10 percent.

43. (original) An absorbent article as in Claim 41, the composite contact length at any point along the length of the pattern, varying from the average composite contact length by no more than about 8 percent.

44. (previously presented) An absorbent article as in Claim 41, said bond pattern comprising

- (i) a first sub-array of longitudinally-oriented separate, distinct, and spaced bond elements disposed along the length of the bond pattern, proximate the side edges of the bond pattern, and

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- (ii) a second sub-array of longitudinally-oriented separate, distinct, and spaced bond elements disposed along the length of the bond pattern, inwardly of the side edges of the bond pattern and generally inwardly of said first sub-array of bond elements, respective ones of said second sub-array of bond elements having spaced first and second ends, and legs extending from the respective ends toward each other and outwardly of the longitudinal axis along the length of the bond pattern to outwardly-disposed portions of said legs between said ones of said first sub-array of bond elements.

45. (previously presented) An absorbent article as in Claim 44, said first sub-array of bond elements alternating along the length, and on opposing side edges, of the bond pattern, an imaginary contact line spanning the width of the bond pattern at a given locus along the length of the bond pattern which intersects a bond element of said first sub-array of bond elements on a given side of the bond pattern, also including on the opposing side of the bond pattern, a said outwardly-disposed portion of a respective said leg of the corresponding one of said second sub-array of bond elements, such that the distance between distal ends of the most remote ones of the bond elements along the respective imaginary contact line spanning the width of the bond pattern represents at least about 70 percent, up to 100 percent, of the width of the bond pattern, whereby the outwardly-disposed portions of the respective said legs provide balancing support on opposing sides of the longitudinal axis from respective ones of said first sub-array of bond elements or opposing ones of said second sub-array of bond elements during formation of the bond pattern.

46. (previously presented) An absorbent article as in Claim 44, said first sub-array of bond elements alternating along the length, and on opposing side edges, of the bond pattern, an imaginary contact line spanning the width of the bond pattern at a given locus along the length of the bond pattern which intersects a said bond element of said first sub-array of bond elements on a given side of the bond pattern, also including on the opposing side of the bond pattern, a said outwardly-disposed portion of a respective said leg of the corresponding one of said second sub-array of bond elements, such that the distance between distal ends of the most remote ones of the bond elements along the respective imaginary contact line spanning the width of the bond pattern represents at least about 75 percent, up to 90 percent, of the width of the bond pattern, whereby the outwardly-disposed portions of the respective said legs provide balancing support on opposing sides of the longitudinal axis from respective ones of said first sub-array of bond elements or opposing ones of said second sub-array of bond elements during formation of the bond pattern.

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47. (previously presented) An absorbent article as in Claim 44, said first sub-array of bond elements alternating along the length, and on opposing side edges, of the bond pattern, an imaginary contact line spanning the width of the bond pattern at a given locus along the length of the bond pattern which intersects a bond element of said first sub-array of bond elements on a given side of the bond pattern, also including on the opposing side of the bond pattern, a said outwardly-disposed portion of a respective said leg of the corresponding one of said second sub-array of bond elements, such that the distance between distal ends of the most remote ones of the bond elements along the respective imaginary contact line spanning the width of the bond pattern represents at least about 80 percent, up to 85 percent, of the width of the bond pattern, whereby the outwardly-disposed portions of the respective said legs provide balancing support on opposing sides of the longitudinal axis from respective ones of said first sub-array of bond elements or opposing ones of said second sub-array of bond elements during formation of the bond pattern.

48. (previously presented) An absorbent article as in Claim 41 wherein bonds corresponding to said bond elements are formed by application of thermal energy to at least one of said first and second flexible sheet materials.

49. (previously presented) An absorbent article as in Claim 41 wherein bonds corresponding to said bond elements are formed by application of ultrasonic-frequency energy to at least one of said first and second flexible sheet materials.

50. (previously presented) An absorbent article as in Claim 41 wherein at least one of said first and said second flexible sheet materials comprises a fibrous web having a multiplicity of randomly-spaced small openings extending from one of the respective major surfaces into the interior of the respective web.

51. (previously presented) An absorbent article as in Claim 41 wherein said first flexible sheet material comprises an outer cover, wherein said second flexible sheet material comprises a body side liner, and wherein at least one of said outer cover and said body side liner comprises polymeric material selected from the group consisting of polyolefins, polyesters, and polyamides, and mixtures, copolymers, and blends of said polymeric materials.

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52. (previously presented) An absorbent article as in Claim 41 wherein said second flexible sheet material comprises a body side liner and wherein said body side liner comprises material selected from the group consisting of porous foams, reticulated foams, apertured polymeric films, polymeric fibers, and natural fibers.

53. (original) An absorbent article as in Claim 51 wherein said body side liner comprises one or more of a mixture of materials selected from the group consisting of porous foams, reticulated foams, apertured polymeric films, polymeric fibers, and natural fibers.

54. (original) An absorbent article as in Claim 41, the length of said bond pattern extending from the front portion of said absorbent article to the rear portion of said absorbent article.

55. (original) An absorbent article as in Claim 41 wherein the crotch portion of said absorbent article is devoid of said bond pattern.

56. (original) An absorbent article as in Claim 41, the width of said bond pattern between the first and second side edges being about 4 millimeters to about 20 millimeters.

57. (original) An absorbent article as in Claim 41, the width of said bond pattern between the first and second side edges being about 5 millimeters to about 14 millimeters.

58. (original) An absorbent article as in Claim 41 wherein said absorbent article comprises a feminine hygiene article.

59. (original) An absorbent article as in Claim 41 wherein said absorbent article comprises a diaper.

60. (original) An absorbent article as in Claim 41 wherein said absorbent article comprises an adult incontinence product.

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61. (previously presented) An absorbent article as in Claim 41 wherein ones of said second sub-array of bond elements extend from loci proximate the side edges to loci proximate the longitudinal axis.

62. (previously presented) An absorbent article as in Claim 41 wherein increases and decreases in power distribution across the width of the bond pattern, as the bond pattern is being formed, can be defined by variations in composite contact lengths as compared to the average composite contact length for a given bond pattern for at least a complete circumferential rotation of a rotary anvil, wherein variations in composite contact lengths of the bond pattern reflect no more than about 13% of the average composite contact length of the bond pattern throughout the complete circumferential anvil rotation.

63. (previously presented) An absorbent article having a front portion and a rear portion, and a crotch portion extending between said front portion and said rear portion, said absorbent article comprising:

- (a) a first flexible sheet material having first and second opposing major surfaces, the first and second major surfaces defining a first overall area of said first flexible sheet material, and a first web interior between the first and second major surfaces;
- (b) a second flexible sheet material having third and fourth opposing major surfaces, the third and fourth major surfaces defining a second overall area of said second flexible sheet material, and a second web interior between the first and second major surfaces;
- (c) a multiplicity of bond elements defining bonds bonding said first and second flexible sheet materials to each other in a bond pattern, and
- (d) an absorbent core disposed adjacent at least one of said first and said second flexible sheet materials, the bond pattern having a pattern length and including a central longitudinal axis, and first and second side edges, the pattern length and the side edges, in combination, defining a third area within which the bond pattern is formed, the third area being smaller than at least one of the first and second areas of the respective first and second flexible sheet materials such that a portion of at least one of the first and second areas of respective said first and second flexible sheet materials is outside the bond pattern, the bond pattern having a bond pattern interior between the first and second side edges, and a pattern width between the first and second side edges, the bond pattern

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comprising an array of separate, distinct, and spaced elongate bond elements in a repeating arrangement affixing said first and second flexible sheet materials to each other,

(e) as ones of said bond elements, a first sub-array of longitudinally-oriented separate, distinct, and spaced bond elements disposed along the length of, and proximate the side edges of, the bond pattern, and

(f) as ones of said bond elements, a second sub-array of longitudinally-oriented separate, distinct, and spaced bond elements disposed along the length of the bond pattern, inwardly of the side edges of the bond pattern and generally inwardly of said first sub-array of bond elements, respective ones of said second sub-array of bond elements having spaced first and second ends, and legs extending from the respective first and second ends toward each other and outwardly of the longitudinal axis along the length of the bond pattern to outwardly-disposed portions of said legs between ones of said first sub-array of bond elements.

64. (previously presented) An absorbent article as in Claim 63, said bond elements of said first sub-array of bond elements alternating along the length, and on opposing side edges, of the bond pattern, an imaginary contact line spanning the width of the bond pattern at a given locus along the length of the bond pattern which intersects a bond element of said first sub-array of bond elements on a given side of the bond pattern, also including on the opposing side of the bond pattern, a said outwardly-disposed portion of a respective said leg of the corresponding bond element of said second sub-array of bond elements, such that the distance between distal ends of the most remote ones of the bond elements along the respective imaginary contact line spanning the width of the bond pattern represents at least about 70 percent, up to 100 percent, of the width of the bond pattern, whereby the outwardly-disposed portions of the respective said legs provide balancing support on opposing sides of the longitudinal axis from respective ones of said first sub-array of bond elements or opposing ones of said second sub-array of bond elements during formation of the bond pattern.

65. (previously presented) An absorbent article as in Claim 63, said bond elements of said first sub-array of bond elements alternating along the length, and on opposing side edges, of the bond pattern, an imaginary contact line spanning the width of the bond pattern at a given locus along the length of the bond pattern which intersects a bond element of said first sub-array of bond elements on a given side of the bond pattern, also including on the opposing side of the bond pattern, a said

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outwardly-disposed portion of a respective said leg of the corresponding bond element of said second sub-array of bond elements, such that the distance between distal ends of the most remote ones of the bond elements along the respective imaginary contact line spanning the width of the bond pattern represents at least about 75 percent, up to 90 percent, of the width of the bond pattern, whereby the outwardly-disposed portions of the respective said legs provide balancing support on opposing sides of the longitudinal axis from respective ones of said first sub-array of bond elements or opposing ones of said second sub-array of bond elements during formation of the bond pattern.

66. (previously presented) An absorbent article as in Claim 63, said bond elements of said first sub-array of bond elements alternating along the length, and on opposing side edges, of the bond pattern, an imaginary contact line spanning the width of the bond pattern at a given locus along the length of the bond pattern which intersects a bond element of said first sub-array of bond elements on a given side of the bond pattern, also including on the opposing side of the bond pattern, a said outwardly-disposed portion of a respective said leg of the corresponding bond element of said second sub-array of bond elements, such that the distance between distal ends of the most remote ones of the bond elements along the respective imaginary contact line spanning the width of the bond pattern represents at least about 80 percent, up to 85 percent, of the width of the bond pattern, whereby the outwardly-disposed portions of the respective said legs provide balancing support on opposing sides of the longitudinal axis from respective ones of said first sub-array of bond elements or opposing ones of said second sub-array of bond elements during formation of the bond pattern.

67. (previously presented) An absorbent article as in Claim 63 wherein bonds corresponding to said bond elements are formed by application of thermal energy to at least one of said first and second flexible sheet materials.

68. (previously presented) An absorbent article as in Claim 63 wherein bonds corresponding to said bond elements are formed by application of ultrasonic-frequency energy to at least one of said first and second flexible sheet materials.

69. (previously presented) An absorbent article as in Claim 63 wherein at least one of said first and said second flexible sheet materials comprises polymeric material selected from the group

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consisting of polyolefins, polyesters, and polyamides, and copolymers, mixtures, and blends of said polymeric materials.

70. (previously presented) An absorbent article as in Claim 63 wherein at least one of said first and said second flexible sheet materials comprises a fibrous web having a multiplicity of randomly-spaced small openings extending from one of the respective major surfaces into the interior of the respective web.

71. (canceled)

72. (previously presented) An absorbent article as in Claim 63 wherein ones of said second sub-array of bond elements extend from loci proximate the side edges to loci proximate the longitudinal axis.

73. (canceled)

74. (canceled)

75. (canceled)

76. (canceled)

77. (canceled)